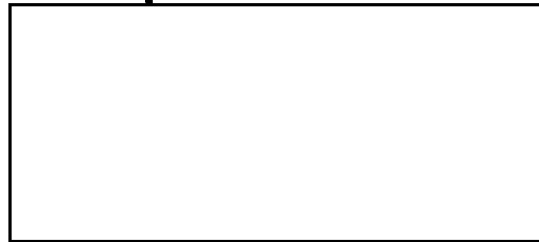


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SOUTH VIETNAM: The death of Lieutenant General Do Cao Tri comes at a particularly unfortunate time for Saigon.

The commanding general of Military Region 3 enjoyed an unusual degree of respect from the men and officers under his command, many of whom are engaged in important operations against the enemy stronghold near Chup, well within Cambodia. His death will probably cause some disruptions, as Tri had a better grasp of the operations currently under way than any replacement can be expected to have at the outset. Nonetheless, Tri's staff is competent, and it will probably make a special effort to provide good support to the new region commander.

The commander of the Capital Military District, Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Minh, has been named acting commander. It has been widely believed that Minh was in line for eventual promotion to region commander. He is trusted by President Thieu and others close to Thieu, an important consideration since Military Region 3 surrounds Saigon and the loyalty of its commander is one important source of governmental stability. While commander of the Capital Military District, Minh did not have much of a political role.

General Minh has been a very capable military commander throughout his career. He commanded the respected 21st Division in the delta from 1965 to 1968 and apparently contributed to its development into one of the best divisions fielded by South Vietnam. Earlier, he won a reputation as a particularly energetic and able administrator as a province chief. He has shown these same qualities while commanding the Capital Military District since 1968. Like Tri, Minh has a highly personalized style of leadership, quick to praise and quick to blame, usually issuing orders personally and then personally following through to make sure they are carried out.

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WEST GERMANY - EAST GERMANY - BERLIN: A leading Bonn official has again called for an intensified Western effort in the four-power Berlin talks.

In a recent meeting with the Western Allied ambassadors, Egon Bahr, Chancellor Brandt's chief negotiator on Eastern affairs, indicated that he saw prospects for moving ahead on negotiations on an inner-German transport agreement with his East German counterpart Kohl. Bahr stressed that in this context he could not discuss Berlin access without a mandate from the four powers, and therefore he urged that the four powers give priority to the access issue. Bahr argued that an early mandate would permit the inner-German and four-power talks to proceed concurrently and thereby speed an overall Berlin agreement.

Recalling his talks with Kohl on 17 February, Bahr indicated a belief that the East German had hinted at concessions and that he was now prepared to negotiate seriously. Kohl reportedly voiced an "opinion" which in effect would accept West Germany's position that it, rather than the Berlin Senate, might negotiate on access to Berlin. Furthermore, the East Germans "might be prepared" to speak in an agreement of "traffic" between the two states, rather than of "transit," an important word change that also would imply a willingness to derogate from Pankow's "sovereignty." By his own account, Bahr was scrupulous in adhering to the agreed Western position that he could negotiate on the Berlin issue only after a four-power mandate. Nevertheless, some informal discussion of Berlin access may be inevitable in the meantime.

In another recent meeting, this time with the Western Allied representatives in Berlin, Bahr again urged the Allies to press forward in the four-power talks. While Bahr's sense of urgency may be stronger than that of most other West German officials, it is symptomatic of a general concern in the Bonn government that no opportunity should be missed in the Berlin talks.

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